

HANDI-REGISTRATION

463 MARIA, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA 55106 612 - 776-7121

Remarks of Charles Van Heuveln

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It's time for all physically impaired people to stick up for their rights and be counted for and to be recognized as first class citizens.

First of all we are people and want to be treated as people. As physically handicapped people we should already have the same rights as anyone else, but in some areas we are denied these rights. This is why we are here today. We are proposing, that this committee recommend to the Governor and the legislature that no person shall be denied equal protection of the laws or discriminated against because of physical disability. This should appear as part of a provision guaranteeing equal rights to everyone no matter of race, color, creed, national origin, religious opinion, sex, physical or mental handicap. It is not only time for physically impaired people to stick up for their rights but for the state of Minnesota to recognize these rights.

The term handicap has several different meanings, but when we speak of the physically disabled, Representative Charles Vanik of Ohio uses the definition which states "the handicapped are that percentage of the civilian population experiencing one or more chronic diseases or impairments over a 24-month period." He uses this definition in support of his bill to amend the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include physical disability. Forty million Americans fit this definition. Twenty-two million people have a physically disabling condition severe enough to interfere with their major daily activity. Each year 100,000 babies are born with defects that will force them to use crutches, braces or wheelchairs all of their lives.

To guarantee that discrimination ends, it is necessary for the Minnesota state constitution to recognize specifically our equal rights.

We want to be able to stress our abilities rather than our disabilities. However under the present legal structure, this is seldom possible.

All that we are asking for is something very simple and that is equal access to our society.

Although there are many areas where we are discriminated against time permits us only to touch on a few. We have spent many hours preparing for this hearing so although seven of us will be presenting testimony, others of us are open to questions.

I will speak briefly on some of the areas in which we are discriminated against. Other major areas will be covered by the other witnesses.

In the area of public education, according to the figures obtained by Representative Vanik of Ohio from the U.S. Department of Education during the school year of 1971-72 Minnesota had 52,242 children with mental, physical or emotional disabilities who were between the ages of 0 and 21 who were not served. Because of architectural barriers students with no mental handicap are required to be bussed to schools outside of their home area because few schools are equipped to handle wheelchairs and crutches. Programs within schools need to be updated and increased. Also counseling needs to become more realistic.

An area that non-physically handicapped people take for granted is signatures. For the person with a physical handicap who is unable to sign his or her name except with an "X" there should be some type of legal stamp instead of trying to find two witnesses every time they have to sign a paper. This process makes it almost impossible for us to have anything like a checking account.

If a person has financial support of any kind it is difficult for him to be eligible for Aid to the Disabled. I think that the handicapped person who is over the age of 21 and unable to work should be entitled to Aid to the Disabled no matter of his or her parents' financial status.

Insurance of all kinds is one of the most discriminatory areas for all handicapped. However, it is also one of the hardest areas to find hard and set policies. There are many examples of where it has been

very difficult if not impossible to obtain insurance.

This discrimination mentioned in these areas is not new. However, most people are unfamiliar with them because the physically handicapped person has few places to turn for adequate legal assistance. Presently the St. Paul Human Rights Commission and the State Human Rights Department say that they cannot handle these problems because the enabling legislation does not include physical disability as one of the discriminated against categories.

Mr. Peter Benzian will speak about the legal aspects of such a provision.